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REPORT
OF THE
COMMITTEE
ON A
SEWER
IN
FELLOWS STREET.



ROXBURY :
NORFOLK COUNTY JOURNAL PRESS.
1857.

CITY OF ROXBURY.

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN, June 8, 1857.

Report read, laid upon the table, and ordered to be printed for the use of the City Council.

JOSEPH W. TUCKER, *City Clerk.*

The Committee to whom was referred the petition of
Sylvester Bowman and others, abutters on Fellows
Street, praying the City to lay a Common Sewer in said
street, respectfully

R E P O R T :

A densely populated town or city requires more or less sewerage, in order that the offal and filth necessarily generated in them may be easily removed. Without it, a city, in many respects, might be likened to a vast encampment, with no facilities for purifying itself, or changing its locality. London and Paris show us how large cities can be purified and rendered healthy, by sanatory improvements and regulations. Constantinople and the cities of Asia afford striking examples of what sinks of pollution they may become without them. Cities are sometimes unjustly stigmatized as sores and moral plague spots on the body politic. A city without the means of self-purification may not unjustly be termed a physical nuisance, and a blotch on the fair face of nature. We must consider, then, that sewerage is indispensable in all well-regulated cities. This is an established conclusion. Connected with, and growing out of, a thorough system of sewerage, is another advantage, and one of vital importance in all communities, we mean under-drainage.

The evils that result from want of suitable drainage are innumerable. It is universally admitted, that all organic matter, in a state of decay, is injurious to health. This effect is visible in all the low and marshy districts of the

South and West;—such districts are unhealthy, and in many instances almost uninhabitable. Portsmouth and Norfolk, Virginia, are situated opposite each other, on the banks of the Elizabeth River, near its junction with the Chesapeake Bay, and not more than eight miles distant from the upper border of the Dismal Swamp. Thus these cities are nearly enveloped by marshes—every where water is within a few feet of the surface, and there is little or no drainage. The result of such a state of things we need not detail;—the terrible ravages of the Yellow Fever in those cities, in 1855, are fresh in the memory of all. The examination of the bills of mortality in all large cities, will abundantly show that, in low and undrained districts, the number of deaths from fever, dysentery, consumption and other pulmonary diseases, is much greater in proportion to the population, than in localities more favorable in these respects, and the average duration of human life is much less. In such localities, in the absence of any system of drainage, open cess-pools are resorted to, and a system of private drainage is adopted. Such means rather aggravate than alleviate the difficulty. For the emanations proceeding from stagnant ditches and open cess-pools, are additional and accelerating causes of disease and death. It is the opinion, as you are aware, of some of the most distinguished of the medical faculty, that the National Hotel disease at Washington, was the effect of the imperfect drainage of that establishment. Nor are these deadly exhalations confined to the immediate districts in which they occur; but extend their influence to neighboring, and even distant places.

With regard to the pernicious agency of such emanations, it would give a very inadequate view to restrict it to diseases most obviously produced by it. Its indirect action is highly noxious, though the evil is not so manifest. When it is not present in sufficient intensity to produce fever, it weakens the general system, and thereby becomes

a powerful predisposing cause of the most common and fatal maladies to which the human body is subject. It has been stated, on the highest medical authority, that no one who lives long in, or near, a malarian district, is ever for a single hour free from some disease of the digestive organs.

The foregoing considerations are urged upon the attention of our City Government, with direct reference to the lower section of our City, especially in Ward One; it is through this that the petitioners pray a sewer may be laid, extending from Hunneman, through Fellows Street, to the water's edge. This locality has now become a permanent nuisance, and an object of just reproach to our City. Here is an area of many acres of marsh, hemmed in on all sides, and possessing no outlet. The soil is low, wet and treacherous; the water, as it falls from the clouds, or is emptied into this district from the adjoining upland, including the liquid filth and offal of the factories and houses, having no outlet, remain stagnant upon the soil. A greenish scum is frequently seen covering the pools of water that are scattered over the surface. The effusions, and noxious emanations that arise therefrom, are inhaled by other residents in the neighborhood, and thus the seeds of disease are sown broadcast.

It is true that this district is not yet densely settled; but in a few years it will be covered with structures of some kind, and the imagination shudders at the thought that a crowded population is to tenant such a locality.

Now we submit, that the remedy for the evils under consideration, is an efficient and thorough system of sewerage. This would furnish means for the ready removal of all refuse and filth; the whole neighborhood would be cleansed, and the effect upon the residents would be marked and immediately perceptible. In Manchester, England, the deaths in twenty streets were ascertained, both before and immediately after their being paved and drained, and they were found to be diminished, by the improvement,

more than twenty per annum out of every one hundred and ten — that is, a little more than one-fifth.

What is now the fertile and healthy territory of Holland, was, in the days of Julius Cæsar, one wide-spread and pestilential marsh, extending along the North Sea, and by the mouth of the Rhine. The tide flowed over most of it, and it was totally unfitted for the occupation of the human race. Yet this country, by a careful and elaborate system of canals and drainage, has been converted into a land of plenty, and now supports a dense and thriving population. Such would be the effect in our City. The soil, saturated with moisture, would become dry and firm; the cess-pool nuisance would be abated, and the net-work of subterranean canals, running noiselessly beneath our feet, would cleanse and purify the dwellings and streets of our entire City.

We are called upon, in the prayer of the petitioners, only to commence this great work of providing sewerage for the City. A common sewer in Fellows Street, would be the commencement of the whole enterprise. Years may pass away before it is completed; but it is of essential importance that a beginning should be made. It is a feeble and shiftless policy to delay longer — the necessity is urgent — your action should be prompt and efficient. The cost of a thorough plank sewer four feet square, extending from Hunneman Street to the City Wharf, was estimated by a committee of the City Government in 1855, to be the sum of three thousand dollars.

There are various ways by which this expense may be defrayed. The whole expense might be charged to the City, in the first instance, the land holders remunerating by payments for private drains to the general sewer; or the whole cost might be assessed on the abutters.

But it is not our object to lay down any plan in this report. This will be a subject for subsequent consideration. Nor do we deem it expedient to make any recommenda-

tions as to the material, construction, and laying down of the sewer. To enter upon this subject, would require surveys, measurements and estimates, that are without the province of your Committee. We are confident, however, that a plan can be devised, whereby, in course of time, the City will be amply repaid for all outlays for this improvement.

Our citizens are very properly opposed to a City Debt; but we think the importance of this improvement will justify the incurring of a limited liability on its account. For it is not for ourselves alone that this work is undertaken; it is also for the benefit of all who are to succeed us. Surely, there can be no injustice in imposing upon them a part of the burden of a work which they will hereafter so abundantly enjoy. But if we insist on paying as we go, a system of sewerage can be so constructed as not to perceptibly increase our taxes. Let the work be carried on gradually, and advance by slow, yet certain steps. Meantime, the lands that are drained will increase in value, and be built upon. And your Committee are assured that, immediately on the completion of the sewer on Fellows Street, herein proposed, the abutters will grade it, and erect thereon respectable structures, and thus the taxable property of the City will be increased, and the undertaking partially pay for itself.

In conclusion, the Committee would recommend immediate action on the construction of a sewer in Fellows Street:

Because the sanitary condition of that portion of the City imperatively demand it;

Because it is the initiatory step of an undertaking, which, from its magnitude and necessity, cannot be delayed without detriment to the best interests of our people.

They accordingly recommend that the prayer of the petitioners be granted.

For the Committee,

JOSEPH H. CHADWICK, *Chairman.*

